

Introduction: Through the Christendom period our lives have been shaped by the impression of the institutional church being the most stable, enduring institution of society. The Scripture and Christian history warn us that the church will be both persecuted from outside and deceived from within.

Contending for the Faith. John 10 7-14. Jude 3-5, 17-2

Prayer: *God of all ages you call the church to keep watch in the world and to discern the signs of the times. Grant us wisdom which your Spirit gives that with courage we may proclaim your prophetic word.*

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

While the short letter of Jude is best known for its popular benediction, Jude was thought to have been the brother of Jesus. If this was so he could have ‘knocked around’ with Peter and they could have known each other well. They could have thought in a similar way because there are close similarities between the letter of Jude and that of 2 Peter.

Jude was preparing to write about the Christian faith when he was suddenly interrupted. As we take up his story he is alarmed, deeply disturbed by news of manipulation and false teaching taking place, so he quickly writes these words to the church in Asia Minor.

V 3. *“I found it necessary and was impelled to write you an urgent appeal and exhort you to contend (earnestly, AV) for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (the faith which was the sum of Christian belief) which was delivered verbally to the Holy people of God.”* (Amplified & Hugh J. Schonfield translation, William Barclay)

(1) **‘to contend / defend’**, suggests strenuous effort. The word in the Greek is *ep-agonize-thai* which contains the root word in English *agony*. The word is used of athletes as they strain and contest.

The writer is saying, contesting/defending the faith may be a costly thing. (a) It may require intellectual effort to understand and teach the Word of God in the right way.

(b) It may require moral effort to choose a consistent lifestyle, to live out the Christian way in everyday life and experience.

(2) We are to contend, for **‘the Faith’**. What is ‘the Faith’?

The faith is a recognised body of teaching, (revealed truths), known to have emerged from Jesus teaching. So later Paul writes,

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you. 1 Cor.11:23.

And again, *For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received. 1 Cor. 15:3*

So, **‘the faith’** then is a core message, a body of teaching that was crystallized by the Apostles, by Peter’s preaching, Paul’s letters and the New Testament.

(3) **‘Once for all delivered (handed down) to the saints’**.

(a) **‘Once for all’**,---the emphasis is on the finality of the revelation in Christ. Once for all means it’s not to be added to, or modified to fit our preferred likings.

(b) 'delivered to the Saints' Note it is a plural. It is not delivered to one person or cult leader. Not to Mohammad/and the Koran, not to Joseph Smith/and the Book of Mormon. Not the Anglican or the Uniting Church but the whole church has become the stewards, tenants, agents of a delivered revelation, -- the heart message of the Christian faith.

The Christian faith is not something we have manufactured, an ideology or view of life we have invented or fabricated with our own minds or brilliance. The Christian revelation has been delivered from outside of ourselves. In the truest sense the Christian gospel has been handed down from generation to generation in an unbroken chain. We need to be aware that we are inheriting a sacred tradition, not a dead law, but a sacred trust in the spirit of 2 Tim 2:2. The gospel of grace entrusted to faithful people who would teach others. Only while this is happening was is tradition living and thriving. The gospel has been passed on like the links of a living chain and as part of that chain we have the Christian Creeds.

Para 9 of the Uniting Church Basis of Union says, “ *The Uniting Church enters into unity with the church throughout the ages by her use of the confessions known as the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. She receives these,-- used by Christians in many days to **declare** and to **guard** the right understanding of that faith.*” Why do we have the Creeds?

(a) Through the New Testament we have fragments of creedal confessions and statements for the purpose of **teaching**, but,

(b) before the end of the first century the church was plagued with false teachers so the creeds were also a **defence** against the pagan teaching of Gnosticism and Docetism.

V 4. *'For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who pervert the grace of our God into lawlessness and immorality and deny our sole Master and Lord Jesus Christ'*. Where in the English we use six words to describe these leaders, the Greek uses one word. That one Greek word means that these leaders *sneak in stealthily*, disguised, but not as secret under-cover agents, no, but parading themselves with credible qualifications as leaders.

Jesus spoke of false shepherds infiltrating and destroying the flock. (John 10:10) Jesus spoke of the church living in a hostile environment. Not only was the church fragile and vulnerable because it faced opposition, violence and rejection from the **outside** world but also from **within**.

Anyone here who is 40 years of age or over has largely enjoyed the benefits of the period we call Christendom and we are probably not used of needing to seriously think about what we really believe. 'Christendom people' have been shaped by sharing the impression of the institutional church as being one of the most stable, enduring institutions of society but the scripture and Christian history tells that this is not the way it is.

From the time of Pentecost the church has faced opposition from **outside** by the rulers of the day and from the **inside** from the time of Ananias and Sapphira (See Acts 5) The understanding and view of life entrusted to the church was so important that Paul wrote to the leaders at Ephesus warning them of *'wolves not sparing the flock.'* (Acts 20:9) He wrote to the leaders at Thessalonica, *'Hold fast, stand firm to the traditions and truths you were taught.'* (2 Thess. 2:13-15) Paul wrote to Timothy, *'Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me. - Guard the good treasure entrusted to you'*. (2 Tim.1:14)

Friends the New Testament and Paul's pastoral letters warn, alert and give emphasis to the fact that a straying away, a distortion or opposition to the truths entrusted to us is not a passing phenomena. But to avoid the impression that I may be exaggerating or overstating the real situation, what I'm saying here needs to be placed into a bigger context.

The decline of the church, rapid cultural change and the loss of biblical literacy that has enveloped the Western world reaches well beyond the struggles of the Uniting Church.

Sometime ago Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury declared that, '*Christianity in Britain is just one generation from extinction.*' The alarming thing is that he went on to describe the general public reaction to his statement as simply being that of '*rolled eyes and a yawn of boredom*'. Now this is certainly one response that an overwhelmed aging church, or a church that is hell-bent on trying to remain popular can adopt - but we can't duck our heads and hope the storm will pass.

In America a Christian media outlet set up by the late Chuck Colson in 1991 has said, '*Churches do not seem to sense the urgency of teaching on matters of marriage, family and especially religious liberty.*'

Today I need to qualify the way I apply these verses from Jude. It needs to be clear that I'm not interested in highlighting negative news or advocating division. I come aligning myself with the good news of gospel as we find it in the Scripture, preserved in the historic Creeds, and the Uniting Church Basis of Union. But to see things in perspective we need to know there is a bigger picture.

Today an International Confessing Movement of concerned Christians around the world has arisen with view to **calling on the church (universal) to remain faithful to the gospel and to the historic orthodox faith delivered to the Saints.**

In most major Churches around the world where the church is under pressure to modify and compromise its message the Confessing Movement has sprung up. In the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Canada, United Methodist Church USA, and the Methodist Church of New Zealand. In the Anglican Church the Confessing movement recently found expression as 2,000 leaders and lay-people met at a Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) in July 2018.

In 1977, three churches came together to create the Uniting Church in Australia. The first sentence of its Basis of Union committed the new church to move forward, "*in fellowship with the whole church catholic*" (universal).

In 2003 the Uniting Church stepped outside of that commitment to other churches and the historic faith by normalising and providing for the ordination of clergy practising a same sex-lifestyle. In 2006 Presbyteries were no longer allowed to refuse clergy living as two gender couples.

In 2018 the Assembly Standing Committee in its radical proposal to redefine the historic doctrine of Christian marriage, again stepped outside the orthodox faith and its ecumenical commitment to consult with other churches.

Instead of moving ahead in **sole loyalty to Christ** (Para 1 of the Basis of Union), the proposal to change the doctrine of marriage in order to provide same gender marriage came in *sole loyalty, not to Christ, but to* promoting a popular brand of ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusiveness’.

To understand the Scriptures, the Christian heritage and what it means to be loyal to Christ is not a matter of political, social engineering that finally ends up following public opinion. We face complex times but being loyal to Christ need not be a matter of taking years to condition people, to prepare and educate people to think differently or of taking years to construct a lengthy specialised rationale for change.

To be loyal to Christ means to be on His mission.

It certainly means reaching out to a pluralistic, diverse world in new ways. It means listening to hurting and marginalised people with genuine, heart-felt compassion and acceptance. It means pointing to the Christ who heals, forgives and reinstates.

It also means being wise and discerning of false gospels. To be loyal to the Christ of the New Testament means to be living and experiencing the power of God’s truth, a good news gospel that,

- (1) calls us to open our hearts and minds to people who different, and especially to the hurts and brokenness of LGBTI people who experience feelings of deep rejection.
- (2) It calls us to feel the pain of a deep desire to be loved and of a confused identity, a sexual/gender dysphoria. But,
- (3) it also calls us, like a grain of wheat falling into the ground to surrender ourselves and our own me-me preoccupation.
- (4) It calls us not to be afraid to die, to actually surrender our lives and deepest desires to Christ. All the baggage and hurts of our past, all the power of our unfulfilled desires and passions.

To move ahead ‘**in sole loyalty to Christ**’ means we surrender ourselves until there is nothing left to grasp onto, nothing, only Jesus and a cross. Nothing, only the certainty of the love of God, His forgiveness, His healing power, acceptance and re-instatement as a person of infinite worth.

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